KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A5 Program Review Cumulative Summary

INTRODUCTION

Four (4) Alternative Education Consultants (AECs) from the Kentucky Center for School Safety, acting on behalf of the Kentucky Department of Education and Commissioner Gene Wilhoit, conducted a review of forty (40) alternative education programs. The four AECs, all with experience in alternative education, were Lue Cole, Mary Ann Cole, Lynn McCoy-Simandle and Lonnie Watts. The purpose of the visits was to review the A5 programs that were randomly selected to ensure that high quality services were being provided to the students in alternative education programs.

PROCESS

To communicate with school districts about the upcoming A5 program visits, Commissioner Wilhoit emailed a letter to superintendents in mid January 2006 explaining the directive from the Kentucky Board of Education to begin an initial monitoring process involving forty (40) alternative education programs.   Furthermore, in the letter Commissioner Wilhoit provided an overview of the process for the visit, informing the superintendents that an AEC would be calling to schedule a date for the program visit. These forty (40) alternative education programs were selected based on characteristics of size, rural or urban description and geographic location.

The programs selected were:

Ashland Central School (Boyd County)	Bardstown Independent Alternative Program (Nelson County)
Barren River Area Alternative School (Barren County)	Northern Kentucky Learning Academy (Campbell County)
Ensor Center (Campbell County)	Carroll County Alternative School (Carroll County)
Casey Academy (Casey County)	Christian County Alternative School (Christian County)
Beacon Central Alternative High School (Daviess County)	Campbell-Reed Learning Center (Clay County)
Martin Luther King Jr. Academy for Excellence (Fayette County)	Project Rebound (Fayette County)
Opportunities Unlimited Alternative School (Floyd County)	Green County Alternative Program (Green County)
Hickman County Alternative School (Hickman County)	Jackson County Alternative School (Jackson County)
Buechel Metropolitan High School (Jefferson County)	Jefferson County High School (Jefferson County)

Programs selected continued:

The Providence School (Jessamine County)	Johnson County Alternative School (Johnson County)
Knox County Learning Academy (Knox County)	The Bentley School (Laurel County)
Logan County Alternative School (Logan County)	Falcon Academy (Monroe County)
Montgomery County Central High School (Montgomery County)	Buckner Alternative High School (Oldham County)
Owen County Alternative Program (Owen County)	Seven Hills Alternative School (Owensboro Independent)
Rockcastle County Alternative School (Rockcastle County)	Russell County Alternative School (Russell County)
Scott County Alternative Program (Scott County)	Shelby County Education Center at Cropper (Shelby County)
Learning Opportunities Center (Simpson County)	Todd County Academy (Todd County)
RIDE Center Alternative School (Union County)	Lighthouse Academy High School (Warren County)
Middle School Learning Center (Warren County)	CARDS Model (Wayne County)
Webster County Alternative Learning Center (Webster County)	Safe Harbor Academy (Woodford County)

The four (4) AECs visited ten (10) programs each. For the larger program visits, one (1) of the three (3) staff members from the Kentucky Department of Education, Dropout Prevention Branch, Nijel Clayton, Mary Jo Rist and Libby Taylor, assisted the Alternative Education Consultants in gathering information.

The AECs followed these steps prior to each site visit:
- called the superintendent; explained the procedure for the site visit; discussed the A5 program monitoring tool to be used on-site, as well as the questionnaire that would be sent with the confirmation letter to be returned before the date of the visit; and scheduled a site visit for at least two (2) weeks after the phone call
- contacted the director of the alternative education program to discuss the site visit, the A5 program monitoring tool and questionnaire; and confirmed the director's availability for the proposed site visit date
- sent a confirmation letter, the A5 program monitoring tool and the questionnaire to the program director and superintendent
- followed up with telephone calls and/or email messages to see if the program director had any questions before the date of the visit

Note: The A5 program monitoring tool used for the program reviews was developed by a focus group and modeled after the Standards and Indicators for School Improvement (SISI). The monitoring tool contains the same nine (9) standards that are in the SISI document, sixty-nine (69) indicators, a description of the fully functioning performance level and examples of supporting evidence. The questionnaire was designed to gather general information about the program's academic performance, learning environment and efficiency, as well as demographic data. The program director sent the completed questionnaire back to the AEC before the date of the visit to provide preliminary information about the program.

During the program visits, the AECs followed these procedures with necessary flexibility:
- met with the superintendent, and sometimes other district administrators, at the central office at the beginning of the day
- traveled to the program site and planned a schedule for the day's activities with the program director
- used the A5 program monitoring tool to review the standards and indicators with the program director
- reviewed any available documentation the program director provided as evidence of meeting the fully functioning level of performance
- observed classrooms for approximately twenty (20) to thirty (30) minutes each; interviewed staff members and students
- reviewed a recent MUNIS financial report outlining expenditures to date
- conducted an exit debriefing with the program director and superintendent (when possible), as well as any other personnel the program invited, to outline preliminary commendations, areas of mutual concern, recommendations and technical assistance available to address recommendations
- took a digital picture of the outside of the program facility and a classroom picture to be included with the A5 program review summary

After the program visit, the AECs followed these procedures:
- prepared the written A5 program review summary based upon the examination of the documents provided by the program and the consultant's experiences and observations, by organizing specific findings and recommendations under each of the nine (9) standards: Curriculum, Assessment, Instruction, Culture, Support, Professional Development/Evaluation, Leadership, Resources/Organization and Planning and designated each standard as fully functioning or not fully functioning
- submitted a draft program review summary to the Kentucky Center for School Safety for editing
- completed a program summary sheet giving each of the sixty-nine (69) indicators under the nine (9) standards a rating and submitted it with the draft program review summary to the Kentucky Center for School Safety to be forwarded to the Kentucky Department of Education Dropout Prevention Branch for data collection

The final steps for the A5 program review process included the following procedures:
- editing of the draft program review summary by staff members at the Kentucky Center for School Safety
- submitting the edited program review summary to Nijel Clayton, Branch Manager for Dropout Prevention at the Kentucky Department of Education for input
- sending the final program review summary to the superintendent and program director
- offering technical assistance provided by the Kentucky Center for School Safety to programs upon request

PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY FINDINGS

Academic Performance: Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction

The curriculum in most programs is not fully aligned with Kentucky's standards and/or local standards, resulting in a curriculum lacking rigor and challenge. Individual learning styles of the diverse student population are not consistently and intentionally addressed through differentiation of curriculum and instruction. Opportunity for assessment tasks that are both rigorous and authentic, based on Kentucky's performance level descriptions, is limited.

Strengths:
- emphasis on improving reading skills in several programs
- allowing students to take vocational classes at the Area Technology Center and/or electives at the A1 school in some programs
- assessments (pre/post) in place to determine the learning needs of students entering/exiting the program (i.e., TABE, Woodcock Johnson) and assessments to identify behaviors in some programs

Common areas of concern:
- one-dimensional curriculum, textbook driven or computer-based, (i.e., JCPS, PLATO, NOVEL/STARS) with teachers serving primarily as facilitators of the self-paced curriculum
- curricular gaps in arts and humanities/vocational and practical living and some course gaps (arts and humanities and health and physical education), particularly in long-term placement programs
- lack of lesson planning, especially in programs using a self-paced curriculum
- staffing issues such as 100-day employees, teachers not certified in content/grade level areas, assigning teachers to the program who do not choose that placement
- inadequate services for exceptional education students (i.e., no teacher on staff with special education certification); over-representation of exceptional education students in A5 programs, especially EBD students
- little emphasis on CATS-like assessments (open response and on-demand writing, and portfolio development) at all grade levels
- no process in place to monitor, evaluate and review curriculum
- little or no use of technology for curriculum, assessment and instruction choices, often due to the need for new or updated computers; no, or inconsistent, Internet access
- little or no homework to expand classroom learning
- few authentic assessments guided by scoring guides/rubrics
- earning credits for courses completed in a short time frame (e.g., two weeks)
- assigning credits for courses taught by someone who does not have teacher certification (i.e., mental health counselors, instructional aides)
- no development and/or monitoring of the Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) in many programs

Learning Environment: Culture, Support and Professional Development/Evaluation

In most programs, it was concluded that the educational staff members care about students and promote a positive (non-punitive) perception of the alternative education program. Most students interviewed said they get the necessary one-on-one attention to be successful in the classroom. Students emphasized that the smaller classroom atmosphere is a positive feature about alternative education programs. However, in some programs where students are placed primarily for disciplinary reasons (alternative to suspension/alternative to expulsion), students expressed

negativity. Not all programs are providing individual and group counseling services to address behavioral issues, even though many students are placed in the programs for disciplinary reasons. Professional development is on going, but the emphasis is not always on sustained and continuous growth, built around individual growth plans and a program improvement plan.

Strengths:
- low student-teacher ratio (usually no more than 15:1 and often only 10:1)
- orientation/intake procedures requiring parental involvement
- referral process in place

Common areas of concern:
- lack of a culture of high expectations for academic performance and behavior
- no behavior management plan in place
- lack of regular counseling services for students with behavioral issues or guidance in social and life skill development in many programs
- transitioning issues involving how long students stay in the program and the lack of follow up once they return to the A1 school
- grade inflation, creating transitioning issues for students returning to A1 schools
- lack of participation in professional development activities that focus on best practices in alternative education and working with at-risk youth
- no formal avenue in place for program teachers to collaborate and communicate with other district teachers to build on best practices in teaching and learning
- Extended School Services (ESS) program unavailable on-site in most programs

Efficiency: Leadership, Resources/Organization and Planning

Most programs are organized to include a principal or lead teacher to provide the leadership. Often the lead teacher has full-time teaching responsibilities, as well. In most programs, leadership does not analyze CATS data at the program level to determine needs, goals and objectives for improvement. In a few programs, staff members participate in data analysis at the A1 schools. Textbooks used in the programs are often not the same quality and/or quantity as those provided at the A1 schools. Textbooks are often outdated and filled with graffiti. In many programs, computers need to be updated and/or replaced. Internet access is not available in all programs. Most programs do not have an on-site library/media center. Students are sometimes bused to the library/media center of another school or to the public library as an occasional field trip. When library books are available, they often do not include high interest choices. Although the Kentucky Department of Education does not require alternative education programs to have an improvement plan, some of the forty programs had developed and implemented some type of improvement plan. However, not all of the improvement plans included an analysis of CATS data to determine priority needs. Most programs are located off-site in separate facilities, sometimes without full access to Software Technology Incorporated (STI); STI often includes only the attendance module.

Strengths:
- regular monitoring of expenditures (availability of MUNIS financial reports)
- assigning of instructional assistants to each classroom in most programs

Common areas of concern:
- lack of analysis of CATS assessment data to build program improvement in most programs
- older facilities and/or mobile units for the location of many programs
- equity issues regarding instructional materials and technology
- delivery of meals to some programs instead of ready access to hot meals in a school cafeteria

- lack of physical activity in smaller programs with only one (1) or two (2) classrooms (especially in self-contained classrooms)
- little or no parental involvement after the orientation/in-take meeting
- low attendance
- failure of some programs to meet the requirement of the six-hour (6) instructional day (i.e., transportation issues, "free Fridays," loss of instructional time in programs where students walk or are bused to another site for breakfast and/or lunch meals)
- blending of short-term/long-term placements in the same program
- serving middle and high school students in the same classroom
- combining A6 students that have mental/behavioral/sexual issues with A5 students placed for academic needs, thus creating high risk for a transfer of negative behaviors

CONCLUSION

Most districts and programs were receptive to the on-site visits, which covered virtually an entire school day, and were cooperative in helping the AECs gather needed information. An obvious outcome of the process was raising awareness of the accountability that alternative education programs must share for all schools to reach proficiency by 2014.

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